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ABSTRACT

This discussion of sexist practices in classrooms throughout the country focuses on the concept of performance-based teacher education as one approach to the elimination of sex bias. Research indicates that female students undergo a loss of academic ability and sense of self-esteem as they progress through school. Male students also respond to sexist practices in education. This paper identifies and delineates competencies to be included in programs of teacher education in an effort to eliminate classroom bias. Suggested competencies fall into four categories: (1) awareness, (2) clarification, (3) classroom behaviors, and (4) professional and societal behaviors. Competencies must be designed to confront and eliminate such debilitating practices as sex bias or they will not be worth the modules into which they are incorporated. (Author/EK)

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Sexism in Education: Reality and Response

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Sexism in Education: Reality and Response

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There appears to be overwhelming agreement that one of the key goals of education is to encourage each child to develop to his or her fullest potential. However, numerous studies demonstrate that sexist practices in classrooms across the country limit the potential of boys and severely inhibit the potential of girls. Even the more innovative teacher education programs do little or nothing to prepare teachers who are able to reduce sexism in schools. In this Paper we shall discuss the reality of sexism in education and focus on one of these new approaches, performance based teacher education, and indicate, by outlining competencies teachers need to reduce and eliminate sexist practices in their classrooms, how one form of response to this problem could occur.

Reality: Loss of Female Potential

There is a steadily growing body of research documenting loss of academic ability and sense of self-esteem that female students experience as they progress through school. Following is what might be termed a "report card," representative rather than inclusive, that gives some sense of this loss of human dignity and potential.

* Intellectually, girls start off ahead of boys. They begin speaking, reading and counting sooner; in the early grades they are even better in math. However, during the high school years, a different pattern emerges, and girls performance on ability tests begins to decline. Indeed, male students exhibit signif-

icantly more IQ gain from adolescence to adulthood than do their female counterparts.[1]

* As boys and girls progress through school their opinions of boys become higher, and correspondingly, their opinions of girls become lower. Children are learning that boys are worth more.[2]

* Grade school boys have positive feelings about being male; they are more confident and assertive. In contrast, girls are not particularly enthusiastic about having been born female. They are less confident about their accomplishments, their popularity, and their general adequacy.[3]

* By the time they reach the upper elementary grades, girls' visions of future occupations are essentially limited to four: teacher, nurse, secretary or mother. Boys of the same age do not view their future occupational potential as so limited.[4]

* Although women make better high school grades than do men, they are less likely to believe that they have the ability to do college work.[5]

* Decline in career commitment has been found in girls of high school age. This decline was related to their feelings that male classmates disapproved of a woman using her intelligence.[6]

* Of the brightest high school graduates who do not go on to college, 70-90% are women.[7]

* The majority of male and female college students feel the characteristics associated with masculinity are more valuable and more socially desirable than those associated with femininity.[8]

* College women respond negatively to women who have achieved high academic or vocational success, and at times display an actual motive to avoid success.[9]

Obviously, we cannot assume that school alone is responsible for these unfortunate findings. However, there is growing documentation that sexist practices do pervade our society, and as our major institution for socialization, schools play a major role in this process. In order to illustrate how schools teach sexism, we will identify and discuss some of the more salient elements of sex bias in elementary and secondary schools.

Curriculum

One way that sex typing occurs is through curricular materials offered to children at all levels of schooling. Whenever an elementary school child opens a reading book, a science, social studies, or math text, he or she is not only learning lessons in the specific content area but in sex stereotyping as well. In Caldecott Medal Winners given by the Children's Service Committee of the American Library Association for the most distinguished picture book each year, there is a ratio of eleven pictures of males for every picture of a female. The ratio of pictures of male to female animals is 95 to 1. In the sample of Caldecott winners and runners up between 1968 and 1972, only two of the eighteen books were stories about girls. Moreover, not one adult woman in the Caldecott sample had a job or profession.[10]

School texts have also been examined. The Women on Words and Images studied 134 elementary school readers from sixteen different publishers and found the following ratios:[11]

Boy-centered stories to girl-centered stories	5:2
Adult male main characters to adult female main characters	3:1
Male biographies to female biographies	6:1
Male folk or fantasy stories to female folk or fantasy	4:1
Male animal stories to female animal stories	2:1

Moreover, Marjorie U'Ren has found that females in school texts are depicted as having less moral strength than males. "Not only are females more often described as lazy and incapable of independent thinking and direct action, but they are also shown as giving up more easily. They collapse into tears, they betray secrets, they are more likely to act on petty or selfish motives."[12]

The secondary school, too, has its biased curriculum. One of the most prejudicial areas of the curriculum is that of history. Janice Trecker has analyzed the twelve history books most frequently used in the public secondary schools. Trecker notes that history is exactly that - his story, and she provides a catalogue of the noteworthy women who are frequently excluded. Trecker also discusses some of the glaring biases in terms of time spent on various topics. For example, one high school text spends five pages discussing the six shooter and barely five lines on the life of frontier women. In another two volume text there are only two sentences describing the women suffrage movement - one sentence in each volume.[13]

Many feminists have commented on the phenomenon that when female characters are present in literature, their only importance is in how they relate to males. In stories about females, the central question seems to be not, "What will I be?" but rather, "Who will he be?" Often female characters, in their attempt to answer the question of "Who will he be?", go through a metamorphosis in order to attract dates or a husband. Typically this metamorphosis consists of a spirited daring tomboy who, in order to attract a man, becomes passive, demure, ladylike and, in the process, a good deal less interesting. In other fiction for junior and senior high school students, some very negative stereotypes about women

are transmitted. Diane Straven analyzed this literature and found that mothers and girl friends are drawn as one-dimensional, idealized, insipid, bitchy, or castrating.[14]

Staffing Patterns

The elementary school may be a woman's world in terms of teaching staff, but usually female teachers take their orders from a male boss. At the elementary level, 85% of the teachers are women, but 79% of the principals are men. This discrepancy in administrative staffing is widening. When one turns to the research, however, absolutely no support can be found for the favoratism given men.

Research studies indicate that women principals rank significantly ahead of men as democratic leaders. They have a more favorable attitude toward curriculum change, are more concerned with the objectives of teaching and the job of evaluating learning. Moreover, the research further suggests that the performance of teachers is rated as more effective in buildings with women principals, and that student achievement is higher in schools administered by women principals. Furthermore, women principals are generally rated much higher in terms of parental approval of schools and of the principal in general. Even on the question of discipline, parents approved of women principals more often than they approved of male principals.[15]

In an excellent review of the research findings in this area, Fischer and Pottker state "These studies clearly indicate that the current criteria used by school boards and superintendents to hire principals is not related to characteristics needed for principal success. Sex has been the determining factor with men quite clearly

receiving preference, although the great weight of evidence indicates that men are less successful as principals."[16]

Segregated Activities

In the elementary school there is occasional separation on the basis of sex-lines with boys on one side, girls on another, or segregated playground and lunchroom areas. This occasional and casual segregation at the elementary level becomes an integral part of the secondary school's official curriculum. It can be seen most explicitly in home economics courses for girls only and shop courses for boys only. Some vocational-technical high schools have also been entirely segregated or have had segregated courses, and in these cases discrimination becomes highly visible. When these courses or schools are segregated, offerings for women are clustered in the clerical skills while courses offered for males are more varied and in areas holding promise for more generous economic returns. Thus, through such courses, the groundwork is set for future economic discrimination against women.

In no activity or course does the discrimination that accompanies segregation become more apparent than in athletic programs and courses. If one examines the budget allotments for male and female athletics, great disparities are often revealed. The Emma Willard Task Force on Education disclosed that in 1970 Minneapolis schools appropriated $197,000 for boys athletics and only $9,000 for girls athletics; in short, more money was spent on boys athletic programs in a single high school than on girls athletic programs in the entire city.[17] Another form of financial disparity is in salaries paid male and female coaches. A woman high school basketball coach recently produced figures showing an

allocation by the Syracuse Board of Education of $98,000 for male coaches and $200 for female coaches.

Between Student and Teacher

Perhaps the key element influencing the reinforcement of sex stereotypes is the way school personnel interact with students. As a result of sex typing at home, girls may be more likely to bring docility, passivity, and conformity to the elementary school classroom, and there they are likely to be praised and reinforced for exhibiting these behaviors. Levitin and Chananie have disclosed that of four types of students - the dependent girl, the dependent boy, the aggressive girl and the aggressive boy - teachers in their sample liked the dependent girl most and liked the aggressive girl least of all.[18] Peshback notes that student flexibility and independence were not highly valued by the sample of elementary school teachers in her study, but these characteristics were even less acceptable when displayed by girls. Conversely, rigidity and dependence were more highly valued in girls than in boys.[19]

Classroom verbal interaction patterns indicate that teachers give male students more of their active attention. Spaulding has found that teachers interacted more with boys in four major categories of teaching behavior: approval, instruction, listening to the child, and disapproval. It seems that teachers not only reprimand boys more, but also talk with them about subject matter more frequently and listen more often to what they have to say.[20] Although it is difficult to assess the impact of all this attention, including negative attention, on boys, Pauline Sears suggests the following result: "One consequence might be a cumulative increase

in independent, autonomous behavior by boys as they are disapproved, praised, listened to, and taught more actively by the teacher."[21]

Sexism and the Male Student

We have been emphasizing the effect of sexism on the female student. However, it is also important to analyze school norms stressing docility and passivity and concern ourselves with their effects on the elementary school boy.

Many educators have been concerned over what they consider the male misfit in a female elementary school world. Boys who may have received independence training in their homes, bring independent behavior to schools which are more accepting of docility and conformity. One result of this lack of congruence between the independent boy's life style and the elementary school may be his realization that school has little meaning or pertinence for him. In fact, Kagan has found elementary children, both boys and girls, labeled school objects such as blackboard, book, page of arithmetic and school desk as feminine rather than neuter or masculine.[22] This perception, that the elementary school is a feminine place where the male child does not belong, may show up in report cards of low or mediocre grades. Boys who do as well as girls on IQ tests and achievement tests get lower grades in school, and, in fact, two thirds of all grade repeaters are male. Within this general pattern of overall lower academic success, the male child appears to have particular difficulty with reading as is attested to by the fact that boys greatly outnumber girls in remedial reading classes and reading clinics.

This trouble with reading may be one of the most unhappy effects

of the conflict of the male student and the elementary school. One study, in particular, suggests how sex stereotypes affect the male child's reading ability. Palardy performed an interesting experiment in which he identified two groups of teachers. The first group believed that girls are better in beginning reading than are boys; the second group of teachers believed that boys and girls are equally competent in beginning reading. The results supported the self-fulfilling prophesy hypothesis: in the first group the female students read better than the male students, and in the second group there was no difference in reading scores between the male and female students.[23]

Response

Recently, there has been a growing response to the reality of sexism in education. There have been numerous articles in journals and some new texts dealing with this issue. Numerous studies have been conducted analyzing the bias in texts, and various feminist presses have emerged to publish materials to redress this bias. However, on the whole, the issue of sexism has made but minor impact on the curriculum of most schools of education.

Response: Competencies for Nonsexist Teaching

Virtually all the current teacher preparation programs ignore the effects of sexism. Even newer approaches such as competency-based teacher education, do not effectively confront the practices and consequences of sexism in schools. Yet teacher education programs must respond to the issue of sexism and, in so doing, serve as a catalyst for significant and important social reform.

A competency-based teacher education program, sensitive to

The need of providing equal and full opportunity to both boys and girls, would include a number of characteristics. Such a program would be designed by males and females and would be administered and taught by women and men. A nonsexist program would have to practice sexual equality in its staffing patterns, for, by observation of models, much student behavior is learned.

The research on the effects of sexism indicates a starting point for the identification of competencies.[24] The competencies we are suggesting have been sequenced in four tiers: (1) awareness, (2) clarification, (3) classroom behaviors, and (4) professional and societal behaviors. This hierarchy brings the teacher from initial awareness of the issue, through clarifying values related to the issue, to various levels of action. The competencies to be achieved in the first tier might be sequenced as follows:

Tier 1: Awareness

To be aware of societal practices, policies and programs which discriminate on the basis of sex.

To be aware of school practices, policies and programs which discriminate on the basis of sex.

To recognize sex stereotyping and bias in various aspects of school life.

a) curricular materials

b) segregated activities and courses

c) school staffing

d) Teacher student interaction patterns

e) Peer interaction patterns

To be familiar with research on differential growth and development of male and female children in the areas of intelligence, self-esteem, need for achievement, and career aspirations.

The above suggest some sample competencies for the awareness tier; many others could be included. The general tone and direction of all these first level competencies are designed to provide teachers with an insight into the forms and results of sexism in school and society.

Tier 2: Analysis and Clarification

The next level of the hierarchy builds on this awareness and requires the teacher to analyze sexist practices and attitudes. This analysis occurs at two levels: a) analyzing one's own attitudes and actions and b) analyzing societal and school attitudes and practices. It is through this kind of analysis and clarification that teachers can begin to make personal commitments concerning the eradication of sexism. Following are some sample competencies that might be included in the analysis and clarification tier.

A. Self Analysis

To participate in consciousness raising sessions concerned with sexism.

To participate in value clarification exercises concerned with sexism.

To recall instances of one's own sexist comments or actions.

To reflect on ways in which sex bias may have affected one's life.

To reflect on ways in which sex bias may affect the lives of individual students in one's class.

To compare one's perceptions of female talents and abilities with empirical evidence.

To identify discrepancies between one's values and one's behaviors concerning the issue of sexism.

B. School and Societal Analysis

To compare and contrast the nature of women's liberation with other ethnic equality movements.

To analyze how specific institutional norms and regulations may inhibit sexual equality.

To analyze the effect the movement for sexual equality may have on future societal development.

To analyze ways in which sex bias operates in school policies and programs.

To analyze curricular materials for sex bias.

To discern biased patterns in student-teacher interaction.

To identify bias in school staffing patterns.

To analyze ways that peer interaction inhibits development of female potential.

To identify crucial times in the growth and development of the female child in which sex stereotyping appears to be most harmful.

Tier 3: Classroom Behaviors

Once clarification and commitment competencies have been attained, the teacher will need to translate attitudes into behavior. The third tier of competencies would be directed at developing classroom behaviors to combat sexism.

To develop strategies for utilizing biased curricular materials for lessons in social awareness.

To interact verbally and nonverbally with male and female students on an individual, rather than a sex stereotyped basis.

To create and practice classroom programs which broaden the options available to boys and girls. Such classroom objectives might include:

To provide activities to develop the athletic potential of female students.

To structure school activities to open shop and various vocational options to girls.

To structure school activities so that home economics becomes a viable option for male students.

To develop learning activities which improve the spatial relations competencies of girls.

To create and practice classroom programs which augment the self-image of boys and girls.

To encourage the career and leadership aspirations of girls.

To accept dependence in boys and independence in girls.

To encourage risk-taking in girls.

Tier 4: Professional and Societal Behaviors

To many educators, a teacher's role in the classroom is a microcosm of a teacher's role as citizen in a community. This suggests that competencies beyond the classroom might also be a part of teacher preparation. Such competencies would encompass the teacher's role in the school at large, in professional organizations and in the community. Such competencies might include the following:

To organize and participate in curriculum development programs to revise sex biased texts and materials.

To advocate and support candidates for elective positions (in school, organizations and the community) on the basis of competence, rather than sex stereotypes.

To organize women's studies courses in the school.

To provide women's studies courses for the community.

To lobby one's professional organization for enforcement of legislation supporting equality of opportunity.

To support programs designed to increase the number of females appointed to school leadership positions.

To participate in programs designed to increase the number of males involved in education during the early childhood and primary school years.

To argue for sexual equality in school budgetary decisions.

Although the structure and specific competencies in this program are meant to suggest rather than prescribe a nonsexist teacher preparation

program, we believe that this program does indicate some of the roads open to performance-based teacher educators. The fact that these competencies are rarely if ever found in a PBTE program is an indication that such programs tend to perpetuate rather than reduce or eliminate sex role stereotyping in our schools and in our society.

New technology, still hampered by old insensitivities, promises no new or better society. Performance-based education may or may not prove to be an effective teacher preparation approach. The question, however, is not simply one of efficient means, but also of ends. Unless competencies are designed to confront and eliminate such debilitating practices as sex bias, they will not be worth the modules they are written in.

Footnotes

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Footnotes

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